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## CRIMINAL POLITICS.

BY E. L. GODKIN, EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK "EVENING POST."

THE most serious question which faces the modern world to-day is the question of the government of great cities under universal suffrage. There is hardly any political or social puzzle the solution of which has not to be worked out in the streets of the great towns. The labor problem, for instance, is almost exclusively a city problem. It is in cities the great labor troubles occur. It is in them that population is growing most rapidly.

The following table shows the increase in the population in five great capitals during twenty years, ending in the year of the latest census:

London... ..	1861. 2,803,989		1871. 3,254,260		1881. 3,814,571
Paris.... ..	1861. 1,696,741		1872. 1,851,792		1881. 2,269,023
Berlin.....	1867. 702,437	1871. 825,389	1874. 949,144		1885. 1,315,297
Rome.....	1858. 180,359		1870. 216,000	1872. 244,484	1881. 300,437
New York.....	1860. 805,658		1870. 942,292		1880. 1,206,290

Far from being dependent for their increase in numbers, as the country districts are in the main, on the majority of births over deaths, they grow in size through immigration on a great scale. In all the leading countries there is a steady stream of men, women, and children into them. Men who have made their fortunes move into them as the places in which there are the most varied opportunities for such pleasures as wealth brings. Men who have their fortunes still to make crowd into them as the places in which there are the best markets and the best opening for every variety of talent.

But far more important than this is the fact that nearly all

the poor, the improvident, the disgraced, the criminals, all the adventurers of both sexes, are consumed with the passion for city life. There is hardly any unsuccessful or unfortunate man in the United States, in England, France, or Germany, or Italy, possessed of any mental activity or bodily strength, who does not think his condition would be bettered by getting to some great capital. The laborers are even more eager for the change than the other classes. A disgust with country life has spread, or is spreading, among workingmen in all these countries. Farmers in England and France complain that, in spite of the aid of machinery, farming is becoming increasingly difficult through want of hands. The new generation are unwilling to cultivate the earth any longer, or endure the solitude of farm life, if they can possibly avoid it.

The cities themselves do everything to stimulate this movement. Parks and gardens, cheap concerts, free museums and art galleries, cheap means of conveyance, model lodging-houses, rich charities, such as every city is now offering in abundance to all comers, are so many inducements to country poor to try their luck in the streets. They are the exact equivalents, as an invitation to the lazy and the pleasure-loving, of the Roman circus and free flour which we all use in explanation of the decline and fall of the Empire. They are luxuries which seem to be within every man's reach gratis, and they act with tremendous force on the rural imagination. Nor is there as yet the slightest sign of reaction. The great transmigrations of the world are in the main those of the farmers from one farm to another ; but there is no sign among the poor of a return to the country of those who have once tasted the sweets of city life. That this aversion from the land among the masses should be contemporaneous with the rapid spread of Henry George's theory, that poverty is due to the difficulty men have in getting hold of ground to cultivate, is surely a very curious social phenomenon. Its success, however, has been mainly in the towns. He has had but few disciples among the agricultural population, and I suspect that even in the towns, if it were possible to analyze the grounds on which his followers have taken up his gospel, it would be found, in nine cases out of ten, that land, in their minds, simply stood for wealth in general, and that they thought of it as something that yielded ground rent or house rent rather than as something that grew crops.

Though last, not least, the opportunities for concealment, for escaping observation, or, in other words, of securing solitude, which great masses of population afford, make the cities very attractive to criminals. They are the chosen homes of everybody inclined to, or actually living, a life of crime or a life bordering on crime. Gamblers, thieves, receivers of stolen goods, brothel-keepers, and the great army of those who shirk regular industry, all throng to the city as the place which affords the best opportunities for the exercise of their peculiar talents. The last-named class forms in every city a very large body of persons who, though not, strictly speaking, part of the criminal population, live on it or through it, and readily descend into its ranks.

This tendency is aggravated in this country by immigration, especially in the case of New York, which is the great receiving port for such additions to our population as come from Europe. In spite of frequent assertions to the contrary, and in spite of appearances to the contrary created by such excesses as those of the Anarchists in Chicago and elsewhere, the bulk of the European immigrants to this country are orderly, industrious people who have contributed much to its material prosperity, and have made, by the sums of money they bring with them, no less than by their labor, by no means insignificant additions to its capital. They have undoubtedly played a very large part in the opening up and reclamation of the regions beyond the Alleghenies known as the West. Without them the creation of the manufacturing industries which we are now so frantically trying to protect through the tariff, would have been impossible. So it will not do to throw on them all the responsibility of our political disorders and shortcomings. But nobody can deny that they have greatly increased the difficulty of the problem of city government under universal suffrage.

Every ship-load of immigrants which lands in New York contains a certain proportion of what may, for political purposes, be called sediment—that is, of persons with no fixed trade or calling or any kind of industrial training, who started with but little money beyond what was necessary to pay their passage at sea. To some of these New York is as far as they want to go; to most of them it is as far as they can go, and they at once recruit the legion of what the French call “*declassés*”—that is, of social adventurers who are compelled to live either by manual labor or

by their wits ; and there is, of course, no one who has any wits who does not prefer the latter. That they furnish constant reinforcements to the vicious and criminal elements of the population it is hardly necessary to say. More than this, they furnish the puzzle of philosophers and the despair of statesmen.

It is impossible to discuss this subject, as far as New York is concerned, without distinguishing between the influence on politics of the different nationalities which are represented in the voting population of the city. The two which play the leading part are the Germans and the Irish. At the last census their numbers were about equal. But there is a great difference in their political activity, partly owing to difference of temperament, partly to difference of training. The Germans are a slow, plodding, somewhat phlegmatic, and very serious people, who, as Dr. Von Holst, in a review of Mr. Bryce's book, truly says, in the feverish intensity of American activity, with their moderate and sober ideals, quiet and steady energy, and modest self-confidence, act as a wholesome leaven.

The Irish are quick, passionate, impetuous, impressionable, easily influenced, and with a hereditary disposition to personal loyalty to a leader of some sort. Their immigration is a more ignorant one than the German—indeed, I might say less civilized. They have for the most part but little, if any, industrial training, while the Germans have a great deal. There are probably ten Germans who come here with a trade of some sort for one Irishman, and their trades are apt to be skilled ones which no man can successfully follow without having some sort of mental discipline and steadiness of character. The Germans, too, come with more or less affection for the government they have left behind and pride in its success. The Irish come with hatred for their home government bred in their very bones. What is, perhaps, as serious a difference as any is that all classes of Germans, except the military aristocracy, are represented in the German immigration. It has always a mixture of educated men and successful business men who are on excellent terms with their humbler countrymen, and united to them by all the usual social and political ties. It is the misfortune of the Irish that their educated class and successful business class have to a great extent been separated from the bulk of the population at home by differences of race and religion, which continue

under the new skies; and the religious differences occasionally treat Americans to the, to them, astonishing phenomena known as "Orange riots." Consequently, the bulk of the poor Irish who drop down into the New York streets as a deposit from each successive wave of immigration find themselves without respectable natural leaders, and a ready prey to sharp-witted political adventurers. They are separated from Americans, too, not only by difference of habits, traditions, and ideals, but by difference of religion—perhaps the most formidable barrier of all. They have to contend against that dread of Catholicism which has now become among all classes of Anglo-Saxons, whether religious or sceptical, an integral part of their mental and moral make-up. And the Irish soon learn to regard the Americans, as they have learned through sorrowful experience to regard the well-to-do class in their own country, as in some sort lawful political prey, whom it is not improper to tax, if they get a chance, without mercy or compunction.

What makes this all the more formidable is that they have familiarity with political machinery, without having any political experience; that is, they know all about voting and agitating and canvassing, but they have never yet elected legislators who were responsible for the government under which they lived, whom they could fairly call to account if their affairs were mismanaged, or of whose misconduct they felt the direct effects. In other words, they have never had the only political training which develops public spirit or a sense of public morality—the strongest argument of all, to my mind, for Irish home rule. Irish parliamentary elections are, in fact, as a means of political training, complete shams. Nor have the Irish had any educating experience in the conduct of their local affairs. The consequence is that a large body of the Irish voters in our large cities enter on the game of politics in what may be called a predatory state of mind, without any sense of public duty, or of community of interest with the rest of the tax-payers. When we add to all this the fact that they are the only large body of immigrants who land in this country with a knowledge of the English language, and therefore can at once become acquainted with the ins and outs of the spoils system as practised by the natives, and with the whole system of "pulls" by which justice is denied or perverted, the public money converted into "boodle," and places won

by the incompetent, the part they play in aggravating the puzzle of city government is not surprising. As voters simply, the Bohemians and Poles are just as manageable as they are. In what is called "the banner Republican district" in this city, the Eighth, in which the late Johnny O'Brien held sway, there are but few Irish. The bulk of the voters are Slavs of one denomination or another, and follow a leader with just such fidelity as the Irish, but they do not know enough to get hold of offices. They do not secure any of the prizes of corruption ; and the reason is that they are ignorant of the language and unfamiliar with the machinery by which a share in the electoral plunder can be obtained.

Though last, not least, the temptation to immigrants who have no skilled trade and are averse to manual labor, and yet have a little more push and intelligence than the mass of their compatriots, to go into the liquor business in New York, owing to the ease with which licenses are obtained, is very strong, and the Irish fall victims to it in larger numbers than any other class of new-comers. But very little capital is required ; in fact, hardly any, as credit for liquor is readily obtained from the distillers and brewers by pushing fellows, and the furniture and fixtures of a "rum-hole" involve but little outlay. With a barrel of cheap whiskey, which can be easily increased by adulteration, and a few kegs of beer on hand, an energetic new-comer in New York not only obtains at once the means of livelihood, but finds himself speedily a prominent social and political figure in his ward, whom men that he thinks highly placed consider it worth their while to flatter, or cajole, or encourage. And the ease with which he can enter the liquor business,—an ease the like of which is not to be found in any other civilized city,—and his joy at finding that in a rum-shop he has made the first step in what seems to him a public career, naturally affect profoundly the imagination of hundreds of his countrymen, both here and at home, who know something about him and watch his progress, and form their estimate of American politics and morals from his example.

It was unfortunate that the change in the constitution of this State in 1846, establishing universal suffrage, occurred simultaneously with the beginning of the great tide of emigration which followed the Irish famine. Its result was that the city was soon flooded with a large body of ignorant voters,

who at once furnished political speculators with a new field for their peculiar talents. Within six years they produced a kind of demagogue previously unknown to the American public in the person of Fernando Wood, who, by their aid, got into the mayoralty in 1854—the first of his kind who had ever done so, for he was to all intents and purposes an adventurer, with no standing in the business community. It was really he who organized New York city politics on what may be called a criminal basis ; that is, he discovered the use which might be made in politics of the newly-arrived foreigner, and the part which the liquor-dealers and all keepers of criminal or semi-criminal drinking-places might be made to play in maintaining party discipline and organization. In controlling a body of ignorant voters, who did not read, no agents could be so useful as the keepers of “resorts” in which men congregated in the evening, and at which they got credit for both food and drink.

Consequently the liquor-dealer, whether as a keeper of a bar, or of a “dive,” or of a brothel, or of a cheap hotel, rapidly rose into the political prominence which he has ever since enjoyed. He became a captain of ten, or of fifty, or of a hundred, according to the size of his rum-shop and his own capacity for leadership. He rapidly took the place in politics which in the early part of the century was held by the foremen of the volunteer fire companies, as a centre of political influence and as the transmitter to the various wards of the will of the gods of the Tammany Society. Wood was succeeded as a boss by Tweed, and Tweed, of course, brought the Wood system to perfection. He gave the liquor-dealers increased political weight, and made his way to the hearts of the tenement-house population by lavish charities, such as the distribution of free coal in winter, which Wood had never thought of, and with a success which may be estimated from the fact that he was reelected to the State Senate by his constituents while the intelligent and well-to-do world above them was ringing with the exposure of his frauds and thefts.

How Tweed passed away everybody knows. He was the victim of his own excess. He might have stolen with perfect impunity for a long period, had he been more moderate. He was ruined by the scale on which he did his work. But his system remained, and in due time produced a successor in the person of John Kelly, who had profited by Tweed's example, practised the



great Greek maxim "not too much of anything," simply made every candidate pay handsomely for his nomination, pocketed the money himself, and, whether he rendered any account of it or not, died in possession of a handsome fortune. His policy was the very safe one of making the city money go as far as possible among the workers by compelling every office-holder to divide his salary and perquisites with a number of other persons. In this way no one person made the gains known under Tweed, but a far greater number were kept in a state of contentment, and the danger of exposures was thus averted or greatly lessened.

The more the Tammany organization had to rely on the liquor-dealers, the more certain and rapid was the transfer of its government to the hands of the criminal class. By criminal class I do not mean simply the class which commits highway robbery or burglary, or receives stolen goods, or keeps gambling-houses or houses of ill-fame. I mean not these only, but all who associate with them in political work, and who share political spoils with them; who help to shield them from judicial pursuit either by their influence with the district attorney or with the police justices, or with the police; in other words, both the actual perpetrators of crimes and those who are not repelled by them and are willing to profit in politics by their activity.

As I have said before, each of the numerous small sets, or "gangs," of which this world is made up has its "headquarters" at some liquor-store, or bar, or club, the keeper of which is its political guide and friend in times of trouble; and he is under a constant impulse to push the political fortunes of his clients and demand recognition for them so as to justify their reliance on him and respect for him. As long as Democratic victories in this city have to be won by his exertions, it is, of course, difficult or impossible to gainsay him. Men of all other trades and callings occasionally retire from "politics" altogether, for a long or short period. But the liquor-dealer never retires. He remains an agitator, organizer, and counsellor by virtue of his calling. His "place" is the centre of political gossip. He knows more of what is going on in the ward or district than anybody else—who hates whom; who is going to "get even" with whom; what Billy has been promised, or why he did not get it; from whom Jake borrowed his assessment, and how much he owes Barney, and what "deals" are in progress or have been contemplated.

Consequently, every organization which counts on him tends more and more to pass into his hands and those of his customers.

This tendency has been strong in Tammany for many years. It has ended in excluding nearly all men of good character and respectable associations from its management. The public, which remembers that it used to have prominent lawyers and business men among its sachems and on its Executive Committee, is habitually startled at finding it in charge of liquor-dealers and "toughs." The remedy so often proposed, of taking away the charter which the Tammany Society obtained in its early and better days as a semi-charitable organization, is puerile on its face. The only use of the charter of the organization as at present constituted is to enable it to own real estate. But it does not need to own real estate in order to exist and flourish. It could get on just as well with a hired hall as with a hall in fee simple. Its strength, I repeat, lies in the control it exerts over the ignorant, criminal, and vicious classes through its liquor-dealers, who never concern themselves in the least about the charter, and do not need to do so. It can exert all its present strength without any legal organization whatever, like any other political club. Its original construction, and design, and history are important in only one way.

No organization such as it now is could be started in our day; that is, the vicious and criminal class could not in any large city get up a club or association which would have the coherence, prestige, and authority that Tammany has. The attempt would be a failure from the outset, even if the organization did not succumb to the attacks of the police. No civilized community would witness with calm or indifference the deliberate formation of a combination which was plainly hostile to public prosperity and order, or the efficient administration of justice. Steps would soon be taken to break it up, or discredit it in some manner, so as to destroy its attractiveness to its supporters. Membership in it would bring such disrepute that men seeking any foothold in the respectable business or professional class would be unwilling to belong to it; politicians would be afraid to have it known that they relied on it, and it would rapidly go to pieces or be reduced to insignificance, even if it for a short period managed to show power.

The reason why the Tammany Society manages to stand its ground is that it is nearly a century old, and for fully half that time was a real political club, engaged in the maintenance and

diffusion of certain political ideas which were, during all that period, making a considerable noise in the world, and effecting great governmental changes in many civilized countries. The leading men of the party which was the exponent of these ideas in this State belonged to it, and a share in its management was one of the rewards of some kind of prominence in the world outside, either political or professional or commercial. Of course this gave it, in process of time, great political weight. Any organization which has managed to exist and flourish for half a century acquires great prestige in a society as changeful as ours, in which organizations of all sorts rise, flourish, and fade with so much rapidity, and in which even the most brilliant local reputations so soon pass out of men's memories. With the aureole thus acquired Tammany came down almost to 1850. Soon after that the vicious element began gradually to enter it and secure control of it, and drive politics, in the best sense of the term, out of it, but with so little outward sign of what was going on that the change, when suddenly revealed in Tweed's day, gave the public a shock of surprise.

Old New-Yorkers learned then that what had seemed to their youthful imagination a sort of temple of liberty, of which the worst that could be said was that it was too much given up to Southern worship of negro slavery, had really been taken possession of by a lot of tramps and converted into a "boozing ken." But they got over this shock somewhat after Tweed's day and the establishment of Tilden's supremacy in Democratic councils, and an air of respectability once more began to surround the ancient edifice. It did not, however, last for very long. The process of degeneration set in once more. The criminal classes renewed their activity, and they were in full possession before Tilden's death; but once more, and in spite of everything, the age of the edifice, the traditions which surrounded it, prevented the public from realizing what was passing within. It consequently almost astounded good people the other day to learn how few members of the Executive Committee could be said to have any really lawful occupation outside politics, or any genuine connection with the respectable business or social world.

Nothing is more surprising in the attempt to deal with the problems of urban life than the way in which religious and philanthropic people ignore the close connection between municipal

politics and the various evils about which they are most concerned. All the churches occupy themselves, in a greater or less degree, with the moral condition of the poor. Charitable associations spend hundreds of thousands every year in trying to improve their physical condition. A conference of Protestant ministers met in this city two years ago to consider the best means of reviving religious interest among the working classes and inducing a larger number of them to attend church on Sundays. Of course these gentlemen did not seek an increase in the number of church-goers as an end in itself. The Protestant churches do not, as the Catholic Church does, ascribe any serious spiritual efficacy to mere bodily presence at religious worship. Protestant ministers ask people to go to church in the hope that the words which they will hear "with their outward ears may be so grafted inwardly in their hearts that they may bring forth the fruit of good living." What was remarkable in the debates of this conference, therefore, was the absence of any mention of the very successful rivalry with the religion which, as an influence on the poor and ignorant foreign population, politics in this city carries on. The same thing may be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the charitable associations. No one would get from their speeches or reports an inkling of the solemn fact that the newly-arrived immigrant who settles in New York gets tenfold more of his notions of American right and wrong from city politics than he gets from the city missionaries, or the schools, or the mission chapels; and yet such is the case. I believe it is quite within the truth to say that, as a moral influence on the poor and ignorant, the clergyman and philanthropist are hopelessly distanced by the politician.

It must be remembered that the poor immigrant who drops down in New York generally comes from a country in which the idea that the public functionaries are the servants of the people, or the product of popular selection, has not as yet penetrated the popular mind. He is apt to hold on still, in a blind, unreflective way, to the old doctrine that the powers that be are of God, and that what a man in authority says or does is, in some sense, the expression of the national morality. He has not as yet learned to criticise public officers or call them to account. He obeys them; he seeks to ingratiate himself with them. He accepts their decisions, if unfavorable, as misfortunes; if favorable, as blessings. He does not dream of appealing against them to public opinion, for he

does not know what public opinion is. No sooner has he established himself in a tenement-house or a boarding-house than he finds himself face to face with three functionaries who represent to him the government of his new country—the police justice of the district, the police captain of his precinct, and the political “district leader.” These are, to him, the Federal, State and municipal governments rolled into one. He does not read Story or Bryce. He knows nothing about the limitation of powers, or the division of spheres, or constitutional guarantees.

What he learns very soon is that, if he makes himself obnoxious to the captain of the precinct, he may be visited with so much vexation as to drive him out of the ward; that if he would avoid the severities of the police justice whenever he has a little scrimmage with one of his neighbors, or gets into “trouble” of any description, he must have a mediator or protector, and this mediator or protector must be “the district leader” or a politician belonging to one party or the other. He then perceives very soon that, as far as he is concerned, ours is not a government of laws, but a government of “pulls.” When he goes into the only court of justice of which he has any knowledge, he is told he must have a “pull” on the magistrate or he will fare badly. When he opens a liquor-store, he is told he must have a “pull” on the police in order not to be “raided” or arrested for violation of a mysterious something which he hears called “law.” He learns from those of his countrymen who have been here longer than he that, in order to come into possession of this “pull,” he must secure the friendship of the district leader. These three men are to him America. Everything else in the national institutions in which Americans pride themselves he only sees through a glass darkly, if he sees it at all.

If he is a man of parts and energy, or rises above the condition of a manual laborer into that of a liquor-dealer or small contractor, he finds himself impeded or helped at every step by “pulls.” If he wants a small place in the public service, he must have a “pull.” If he wants a government contract, he must have a “pull.” Whether he wants to get his just rights under it, or to escape punishment for fraud or bad work in the execution of it, he must have “a pull.” In the ward in which he lives he never comes across any sign of moral right or moral wrong, human or divine justice. All that he learns of the ways of Providence in the gov-

ernment of the city is that the man with the most "pulls" gets what he wants, and that the man with no "pulls" goes to the wall. Every experience of the municipality satisfies him that he is living in a world of favor and not of law. He hears that large sums of money are voted every year for the cleaning of the streets, but he sees that they are not cleaned. He hears that it is forbidden to throw out dirt and ashes into the highway, but he sees that all his neighbors do it with impunity. He hears that gambling-houses and houses of prostitution are forbidden, but he sees them doing a roaring trade all around him. He hears that it is a crime to keep a liquor-saloon open on Sunday, but he finds the one he frequents is as accessible on Sunday as on any other day. He hears that licenses to sell liquor should be granted only to persons of good character, but he sees that the greatest scoundrels in his neighborhood get them and keep them as readily as any one else. He has come over the sea with the notion that magistrates should be grave and discreet persons, learned in the law, but he sees seated on the bench in his own district his own friend, Billy McGrath, who plays poker every night with him and "the boys" in Mike Grogan's saloon, and in court always gives his cronies "a show." Nowhere does he come on any standard of propriety or fitness in the transaction of public business, or on any recognition of such things as duty or honor in dealing with the public interests.

Now, what chance have the city missionaries and philanthropists of making themselves felt in an atmosphere of this sort? They might as well go to the African heathen, and try to make Christians by dividing their preaching time with the medicine-men, as to try to make an impression on the poor of this city as long as the administration of its affairs is a standing denial of God. What helpless visionaries they must seem to thousands as they wander about the liquor-saloons with their Bibles, and tell their tales of what good Americans think about life and death and judgment, and about the prosperity which waits on the honest man and good citizen. The truth is that any one who occupies himself with the moral and religious elevation of the poor in this city can no more disregard politics than a doctor, in treating physical disease, can refuse to take notice of bad drains or decaying garbage. He must not only take politics into account in his work, but must take it into account at the very beginning.

What is to be done by reformers generally to introduce a new and better régime into city affairs, it is not easy to describe fully within the limits of an article like this. There are certain things, however, which have been fully tried and have so plainly failed that no more mention should be made of them. One is the denunciation of universal suffrage. There is no doubt that universal suffrage has added to the difficulties of city government, and has lowered the standard of official purity and fitness ; but, to use the slang phrase, it has so plainly “come to stay,” and is so firmly lodged in the political arrangements of most civilized nations, that it is a mere waste of time to declaim against it. Complaining of it as an obstacle to good government is like complaining of a stormy sea as a reason for giving up navigation.

Another is reliance on the State Legislature for new charters, or for the expulsion of bad men from office by special legislation. This mode of reform was begun in 1857, when the Republican party got possession of the State government, and it has ended in converting the interests of the city into gambling-stakes for Albany politicians to play with. They oust each other from city offices with no more reference to the interests of city tax-payers than butchers on killing-day to the feelings of the oxen. There have been eleven charters enacted since 1846, and we have now got the best of them all, and the best we are in the least likely to get. It is the simplest, and puts more direct power into the hands of the city voters than they have ever had before. Its excellence lies in the fact that it concentrates in the mayor responsibility for appointments to all the leading offices except the comptrollership, and puts the control of taxation in the hands of a small body of conspicuous men elected on a general ticket. We cannot do better than this. It makes every election a direct appeal to the good sense and public spirit of the voter. No community as heterogeneous as ours can manage its affairs successfully through democratic forms without reducing to its lowest possible point the number of executive officers whom it has to watch, and call to account when things go wrong. As soon as responsibility is widely diffused in such a community, “deals” or bargains between politicians for the division of the offices at once begin.

For we have among our other difficulties to deal with the fact—in some of its aspects a tremendous one—that the fifty years of the spoils system have almost destroyed in the popular mind the

tradition of trusteeship in connection with public offices. Among active politicians they are now almost universally looked upon, as in France under the old régime, as franchises or privileges authorizing the holder to levy a certain amount of toll on the State for a certain limited period. Until this view has been eradicated, it is reasonable to fear that a large municipal legislature or council, which some are thinking of, would simply be a reproduction on a smaller scale of the Albany Legislature, with whose weaknesses and defects the public by this time is tolerably familiar. It is safe to say that, as things are to day, we cannot better ourselves by any changes in the framework of the city government which there is the least chance of obtaining from the law-making power, except in one particular, and that is the exaction of higher qualifications for the office of police justice. The police magistrates are, after the mayor, perhaps the most important city officers. They have a more direct relation to municipal health and morals than any other. They ought to be lawyers, of at least seven years' standing at the bar, and men of established character and repute. At present there is no standard of fitness for the office whatever. Any man who can get it through "pulls" is held to be competent to fill it, and it is, as a matter of fact, disposed of as a piece of party spoil to active local politicians. So that it may be said that, with this exception, we have had since 1885, when the absolute power of appointment was put into the mayor's hands, as good a scheme of local government as we have ever had, or are likely to have within any period worth thinking about for practical purposes.

Have we, then, exhausted our resources? Is the rule of the criminal classes under which we are living at this moment destined to be permanent? Who or what is to blame for it? Can it not be shaken off, or can its recurrence not be prevented?

The answer to these questions is comparatively easy. There is nothing unnatural or abnormal in our condition. It is the plain and natural effect of causes of the simplest and most obvious kind. In fact, it would be very odd if we were any better off than we are, considering the way in which we manage our municipal business. The objects of a municipal corporation are nearly as definable as those of a railroad company. They consist simply in supplying the inhabitants of a certain locality with certain conditions of physical health and comfort, plus the education of their children.



The work is paid for by an annual subscription, and the executive officers are elected by a general vote. If there be in this world a plain moral obligation, it is the obligation which rests on every inhabitant to use his vote in electing these officers solely in the common interest of himself and his neighbors. To use it in his own individual interest, or in the interest of some other corporation or body of persons not dwelling in the locality or owning property in it, is of exactly the same moral quality as the transaction called "wrecking a railroad," in which the directors of a railroad corporation ruin it either for their own personal gain or in order to contribute to the prosperity of some other railroad.

In other words, it is a breach of trust. The more poor, or ignorant, or helpless neighbors the inhabitant of a municipal corporation has, the more solemn is the obligation which rests on him to use his superior intelligence for their benefit. He has no right to let them be swindled by clever sharpers if he can prevent it, simply because they are easily duped. He has no right to say that, as he can take care of himself in any event, he is not going to trouble himself about the plight of those who have neither knowledge enough nor money enough to protect themselves against fraud. He has no right to shut his eyes to dirty streets elsewhere because he can afford to keep his own street clean by private contract, and has a country house where he spends half the year. He has no right to surrender the poor to corrupt or ignorant judges, because he can pay for the best police the country affords. In short, he has no right to live an absolutely selfish life in the city any more than in the country at large. Patriotism has its municipal obligations as well as national obligations, and, in fact, makes duty to the municipality far clearer to the plain man than duty to the nation.

If this be all true,—and I do not think it will meet with denial from any respectable source,—we shall have little difficulty in showing that the responsibility for our local misgovernment by no means rests on "the ignorant foreigners": on the contrary, it rests very distinctly on the intelligent and well-to-do natives. They have three times since 1884 deliberately gone through the process known in railroading as "wrecking"—that is, have tried to use the municipal administration to promote schemes in which the city, as a city, has no special interest whatever. If the minority of the stockholders of a bank were to endeavor to

put into office a certain board of directors, in order that they might make heavy loans to political committees, or merely in order to show their own strength, they would soon stand in the public eye in the same moral, if not legal, position as the men who wrecked the Sixth National Bank. And yet it is difficult, from the moral point of view, to distinguish between such conduct as this and the conduct of the Republicans who at every mayoralty election, when they know they cannot succeed, persist in running a third candidate in order to exert influence on the Presidential election or on congressional legislation.

New York is, has been, and probably will remain for an indefinite period, a Democratic city. In so far as "Democratic" means the votes of the more ignorant of the population, of course this is to be regretted. I regret it as much as anybody. But it is a fact, and has to be dealt with as a fact. And there is another fact of the situation still more important than this—a fact which I think may be called unique as a political phenomenon; namely, that the ignorance and vice of the city have been organized in an association mainly for the purpose of plundering the municipal treasury and quartering a large body of shiftless people on the public service. But, fortunately for the city, this association does not contain a majority of the municipal voters, though it does contain a majority of Democratic voters.

But the minority of Democrats who are hostile to it and to its works and ways, and are willing to act against it, is considerable—considerable enough to put the association in a minority at city elections. These dissentient Democrats cannot be got to accept Republican nominations, no matter how good they are: this, too, is very regrettable. It would not be true if all Democrats were as intelligent and public-spirited as we should wish to see them. But it is a fact, and has to be dealt with as a fact. It has, therefore, to be taken into account by intelligent and honorable men, in providing the city with an administration, just as much as the liability of city houses to take fire. Municipal politics, like all other politics, is a practical art. It deals with men as they are, and not as we wish them to be. There is hardly one of us who, if he had the power of peopling New York anew, would not make an immense number of changes among its present inhabitants. But the problem before the wise and good is simply how to give the present inhabitants, such as they are, with all their

imperfections on their heads, the best attainable government. The lesson of experience on this point is that we should vote for the best candidate whom either Democratic faction puts up, and try to extract a good nomination from it by the promise or offer of this support. In nine cases out of ten this would give us as good a city government as we are, in the present condition of human nature, entitled to.

It would have given Mayors Grace and Hewitt overwhelming majorities in 1884 and 1888. They were elected, it is true, in its absence, and they began a process of filling city offices which, but for the Republican mistake in running a candidate in aid of General Harrison in 1888, would, in spite of some haltings, have gradually revolutionized the municipal service and established sound and probably permanent administrative traditions. As it was, this process put first-rate men at the head of the Board of Public Works and of the Health Board. It partially rescued the Excise Board from the liquor-dealers and considerably improved the Park Board; and had the large number of vacancies which have fallen into the hands of Tammany during the term of Mayor Grant been placed at the disposal of Mayor Hewitt, or of a man like him, we should have entered on the year 1891 with brighter municipal prospects than New York has known for fifty years.

But there can be no hope of permanent improvement in municipal business, any more than in any other business, until city elections are conducted for the sake of the city. Any business which is administered in the interest of some other business soon ends in bankruptcy. A dry-goods business managed with a view not to the sale of the dry goods, but the establishment of a newspaper, would not last very long. New York is too rich to be brought to insolvency. Great cities, when badly administered, cannot be sold and abolished; they simply become dirty, unhealthy, unsafe, disgraceful, and expensive. It is high time that this great municipal shame disappeared from among us, and deliverance ought not to be difficult, for we believe there is not a city in the Union in which the honest, well-meaning, orderly, and industrious voters are not in a large majority.

E. L. GODKIN.